



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Edinburgh Research Explorer

Comment on 'Antibiotic footprint' as a communication tool to aid reduction of antibiotic consumption

Citation for published version:

Moran, D 2019, 'Comment on 'Antibiotic footprint' as a communication tool to aid reduction of antibiotic consumption', *Journal of Antimicrobial Chemotherapy*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jac/dkz251>

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):

[10.1093/jac/dkz251](https://doi.org/10.1093/jac/dkz251)

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Published In:

Journal of Antimicrobial Chemotherapy

Publisher Rights Statement:

© The Author(s) 2019. Published by Oxford University Press on behalf of the British Society for Antimicrobial Chemotherapy. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted reuse, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

General rights

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact openaccess@ed.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



J Antimicrob Chemother
doi:10.1093/jac/dkz251

Comment on: 'Antibiotic footprint' as a communication tool to aid reduction of antibiotic consumption

Dominic Moran  *

Global Academy of Agriculture and Food Security, The University of Edinburgh, The Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies and The Roslin Institute, Alexander Robertson Building, Easter Bush Campus, Midlothian EH25 9RG, UK

*Tel: +44-(0)131-651-7439; E-mail: Dominic.Moran@ed.ac.uk

Sir,

In an interesting contribution, Limmathurotsakul *et al.*¹ suggest that an antibiotic footprint calculation analogous to a more familiar carbon footprint may be a compelling way to represent the different forms of antibiotic use and to benchmark performance in reducing use across clinical and agricultural settings. In doing so, they are the latest of several papers highlighting the parallels between metrics used to manage climate change mitigation (i.e. reduction in greenhouse gas emissions) and antibiotic use as a precursor to antimicrobial resistance (AMR).^{2–4}

However, it is important to be clear on what a footprint concept represents and to consider that its application to antibiotics may potentially be misleading. Originally, the ecological footprint signifies the resource requirement to offset ecological damage,⁵ typically the area of land required to offset the greenhouse gas emissions of a spatial jurisdiction. Thus, the UK footprint could be equated to an area required to plant trees to sequester the annual emission of CO₂ equivalent. Going beyond the greenhouse gas metric alone, another eye-catching interpretation suggests that humanity uses the equivalent of 1.7 Earths to provide the resources we use and absorb our waste. In other words, the globe has an ecological deficit and the calculation can even pinpoint the day of the year when this starts.

Footprints provide a compelling message to governments and consumers about the sustainability or otherwise of current consumption trends (e.g. there is no planet B) and are a precursor to literature on planetary boundaries.⁶ This is a bit more sophisticated than counting the impact, e.g. total life-cycle emissions of a production process as apparently implied by Limmathurotsakul *et al.*,¹ who seemingly equate the footprint to an alternative representation of antimicrobial use inventory data.

There are several potential policy-relevant metrics to represent antibiotic use and it is important to be clear on their interpretation in the AMR context. We should also avoid overstating the power of footprinting rhetoric, when evaluation evidence is conspicuously absent. More importantly, apart from drug innovation, there is no obvious offsetting analogy applicable to AMR. It is important that this message is clear in any metric.

Funding

The author acknowledges support from UK Newton Fund awards co-funded by the Economic and Social Research Council grant numbers ES/S000186/1 and ES/S000208/1, linked to the India Department of Biotechnology grant numbers BT/IN/Indo-UK/AMR/06/BRS/2018-19 and BT/IN/Indo-UK/AMR/03/RKE/2018-19.

Transparency declarations

None to declare.

References

- 1 Limmathurotsakul D, Sandoe JAT, Barrett DC *et al.* 'Antibiotic footprint' as a communication tool to aid reduction of antibiotic consumption. *J Antimicrob Chemother* 2019; doi:10.1093/jac/dkz185.
- 2 Woolhouse M, Farrar J. Policy: an intergovernmental panel on antimicrobial resistance. *Nature* 2014; **509**: 555–7.
- 3 Moran D. Antimicrobial use and planetary health: developing a framework for priorities. *Lancet Planet Health* 2018; **2**: e277–8.
- 4 Roope LSJ, Smith RD, Pouwels KB *et al.* The challenge of antimicrobial resistance: what economics can contribute. *Science* 2019; **364**: eaau4679.
- 5 <https://www.footprintnetwork.org/our-work/ecological-footprint/>.
- 6 Jørgensen PS, Aktipis A, Brown Z *et al.* Antibiotic and pesticide susceptibility and the Anthropocene operating space. *Nat Sustain* 2018; **1**: 632–41.